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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 002091

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FOR NEA/PI AND NEA/ARPI - BERNIS

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT: DEMOCRATIC REFORM STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT FREEDOM AGENDA

REF: STATE 80607

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (U) Introduction: Kuwait proudly identifies itself as the region's oldest functioning democracy, pointing as evidence to its 43-year-old constitution; active elected National Assembly; and separate executive, legislative, judicial branches. The May 16 decision to grant Kuwaiti women full political participation was a landmark event in Kuwait's political history and democratic development. Respect for basic rights of free speech and assembly are ingrained in Kuwaiti society and respected by the Government. Nonetheless, while citizens elect a Municipal Council and National Assembly, they do not have the right to change their government. 2003 National Assembly elections were generally considered to be free and fair, but there were credible reports of vote buying.

2. (C) Although there is a recognized need for political and economic reform, and senior members of the Government have called for change, the GOK is not sure how to affect further reform and what shape it should take. There is concern that democratic reform, should it be drastic and occur too fast, would disrupt existing stability and invite interference from more conservative elements of society and from Saudi Arabia and Iran, both of which the GOK wants to keep at bay. The U.S. strategy for democratic reform in Kuwait must be far-reaching, comprehensive, and focus on the benefits to Kuwait from reform measures. Greater success will come from supporting Kuwaiti initiatives and using global models rather than U.S.-specific examples. (For example, a resource requirement for the desired outcomes below is funding for an Arabic translation and regular distribution of the "Journal of Democracy." This publication would be well received by academics, journalists, and government officials, in part because of the diverse backgrounds of its contributors.) Additionally, Kuwaitis are a proud and independent people, and successful reform efforts in neighboring countries will spur action from a nation that prefers to distinguish itself from other Gulf states.

3. (C) Priorities: For the period through December 2006, the U.S. focus should be on political reform, particularly GOK efforts to promote the full political participation of Kuwaiti women. We should ensure that women, now empowered to vote and run for office, play an active role in Kuwait's political life. We should also promote the formation of political parties, a step that would eventually help to reduce tribal influence and religious ideology on domestic politics. Support for a free press would also contribute to reform efforts. For all of our MEPI objectives, sustained, coordinated engagement by senior USG officials and Members of Congress will be critical.

4. (C) Desired Outcomes:

A. Full Political Participation for Kuwaiti Women

2005 Milestone: On May 16, the National Assembly passed legislation granting women full political participation at the municipal and national levels. Although women will not be able to run for national office until 2007 and the Municipal Council until 2009, we should encourage that women serve on the Municipal Council in seats appointed by the GOK, and that the GOK name women as government ministers. The Ministry of Health position is currently vacant and speculation is that a woman may fill that void. Many Kuwaitis also believe that ruling family member and current Under Secretary for Higher Education, Dr. Rasha Al-Sabah, will soon become the Minister of Education.

2006 Milestone: By the end of 2006 Kuwaiti women will be registered to vote for Parliament and several women will be preparing to run for the 2007 National Assembly elections.

Strategy: The U.S. position on women's political rights is well known and some Kuwaitis believe the USG was the main impetus for the GOK push for women's political rights. As requested by supporters of women's rights, the Embassy maintained a fairly low profile on the issue to not detract

from this basic right. This does not mean that we were silent. Rather, Embassy Kuwait regularly stressed the importance of women's political rights with senior Government officials and MPs. We will continue to engage the GOK, reminding them that all Kuwaitis must understand their political rights and how to use them.

Programming/Tactics: Post will continue to engage Government officials and MPs on the need for full political participation. Embassy Officers will attend diwanis, seminars, and lectures on voting rights and participation. Post will also continue to host representational events (a recent Ambassador-hosted lunch for women activists and a Political Section-hosted movie night for suffrage supporters were popular events) to signal U.S. interest and support. Post will seek additional MEPI projects designed to advance women's political participation.

Resources Requirements: MEPI funding for National Democratic Institute (NDI) or similar organization to conduct campaign training workshops for women (preferably in a GCC or region-wide context in order to promote learning from other women in the region and dilute any charges of USG interference in internal politics); funding for a single country IV program to bring Kuwaiti women together to meet with American women active in politics; increased funding for speakers' programs (the July 2004 visit of the former Lieutenant Governor of South Dakota on women's political and social rights was very successful); increased representation allowance for hosting events on women's issues.

Consequences: The U.S. should support and train women running for office and increase awareness about the benefits of women playing an active role in Parliament. Women should not fail to be elected to the National Assembly because of insufficient support from the U.S.

1B. Desired Outcome: Establishment of Political Parties

2005 Milestone: A comprehensive national dialogue emerges on permitting political parties and the National Assembly holds committee hearings.

2006 Milestone: The GOK introduces legislation to permit parties. Parties are established based on shared beliefs and membership cuts across religion, economic standing, and tribal affiliation. Unofficial slates are identified for 2007 National Assembly elections.

Strategy: The 2005 resignations of three ministers highlighted the influence tribal identification and religious affiliation can have on the GOK and its ability to govern. Through close contacts with senior Government officials and MPs, Embassy Officers will raise awareness to the benefits of political parties and how they can serve the broader community instead of a subset.

Programming/Tactics: Post will continue to engage Government officials and MPs on the benefits of political parties and their potential for reducing influence based on tribal or religious ties. Embassy Officers will attend diwanis, seminars, and lectures in favor of political party establishment. Post will use MEPI funds and IV programs to educate MPs and voters about political parties.

Kuwait was invited as an observer to the April 2005 ministerial meeting of the Community of Democracies (CD) in Santiago, in order to sustain reform momentum, the U.S. and CD partners should consider inviting Kuwait to become more active in the community.

Resource Requirements: The Political Officer position responsible for monitoring Parliament was not filled in the 2005 assignment process. For sustained, active engagement, Post requires the assignment of an entry- or mid-level officer, analyst, or Presidential Management Fellow. Post also desires a single-country IV program for members of Parliament and their staffs to see how political parties function at the national and local levels. Post also requires funding for the Arabic translation and distribution of the "Journal of Democracy," and an enhanced speaker program on the development of legislatures and parties. Kuwait's Parliament consists of one house, MPs might welcome some type of exchange with the Nebraska Senate, the only U.S. unicameral legislature.

Consequences: Some will unquestionably accuse the USG of meddling in Kuwait's domestic politics. To diminish such criticism, we should reach out to all established political blocs from the liberals to the Islamists. We should also coordinate closely with NGOs, the EU, and others who share our goals.

1C. Desired Outcome: Enhanced Freedom of Expression and Responsible Journalism

Milestone 2005: The GOK abandons the current draft press law that would impose greater restrictions on the media such as weakening libel protections and giving the GOK greater control of advertising content and extending its ability to shut down newspapers.

Milestone 2006: In consultation with the media, the GOK submits a revised press law that reinforces press freedom.

Strategy: Kuwait has an active media, but self-censorship, poor standards, and Government interference hamper freedom of the press. Embassy Officers will engage the GOK on how an active, vibrant press can contribute to political and economic reform and impress upon the media the need for trained reporters and responsible journalism.

Programming/Tactics: Post will use IV programs and in-country workshops to promote responsible journalism. Post will continue to place articles in local publications to not only advance U.S. policies, but also to serve as examples of well-researched, balanced news. Post will also strengthen efforts to counter dis-information. Post will also continue to actively program speakers with backgrounds in writing and journalism.

Resource Requirements: The Public Affairs Section is currently understaffed. We continue to look for a qualified candidate to fill the vacant Information Assistant position and if not hiring locally, will require funding for relocation expenses. Post will also use MEPI and IV programs to advance this goal.

Consequences: A better informed public will likely play a more active role in Kuwait's political development, demanding and asserting its rights under the constitution.

15. Organization: Post has an active MEPI Committee chaired by the DCM, with a Political Officer serving as Post Coordinator.
LEBARON